

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks Following a Meeting With Crew Members of the *Apollo 11* Moon Landing

July 20, 2009

Very rarely do I have such an extraordinary pleasure as I have today to welcome three iconic figures, three genuine American heroes. To have Neil Armstrong, Michael Collins, and Buzz Aldrin here beside me is just wonderful. And I think that all of us recall the moment in which mankind finally was untethered from this planet and was able to explore the stars, the moment in which we had one of our own step on the Moon and leave that imprint that is there to this day. And it's because of the heroism, the calm under pressure, the grace with which these three gentlemen operated, but also the entire NASA family that was able to—at great risk oftentimes, and with great danger—was somehow able to lift our sights, not just here in the United States but around the world.

We now have a wonderful NASA Administrator in Charles Bolden and the Deputy Administrator Lori Garver. We are confident that they are going to be doing everything that they can in the decade to come to continue the inspirational mission of NASA. But I think it's fair to say that the touchstone for excellence in exploration and discovery is always going to be represented by the men of *Apollo 11*.

And so I'm grateful to them for taking the time to visit with us. The country continues to draw inspiration from what you've done. I should note, just personally, I grew up in Hawaii, as many of you know, and I still recall sitting on my grandfather's shoulders when those capsules would land in the middle of the Pacific, and they'd get brought back, and we'd go out, and we'd pretend like they could see us as we were waving at the folks coming home. And I remember waving American flags and my grandfather telling me that the Apollo mission was an example of how Americans can do anything they put their minds to.

I also know that, as a consequence of the extraordinary work of NASA generally, that you inspired an entire generation of scientists and engineers that ended up really sparking the innovation, the drive, the entrepreneurship, the creativity back here on Earth. And I think it's very important for us to constantly remember that NASA was not only about feeding our curiosity, that sense of wonder, but also had extraordinary practical applications. And one of the things that I've committed to doing as President is making sure that math and science are cool again, and that we once again achieve the goal by 2020 of having the highest college graduation rates of any country on Earth, especially in the maths and science fields.

So I think on this 40th anniversary, we are—all of us thankful and grateful to all of you for what you've done, and we expect that there's, as we speak, another generation of kids out there who are looking up at the sky and are going to be the next Armstrong, Collins, and Aldrins. And we want to make sure that NASA is going to be there for them when they want to take their journey.

All right. Thank you so much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:14 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Neil A. Armstrong, mission commander, Michael Collins, command module pilot, and Edwin E. "Buzz" Aldrin, Jr., lunar module pilot, *Apollo 11*.

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